

# Educational Researcher

<http://er.aera.net>

---

## Through a Glass Darkly : The Persistence of Race in Education Research & Scholarship

Gloria Ladson-Billings

*EDUCATIONAL RESEARCHER* 2012 41: 115

DOI: 10.3102/0013189X12440743

The online version of this article can be found at:

<http://edr.sagepub.com/content/41/4/115>

---

Published on behalf of



[American Educational Research Association](#)

and



<http://www.sagepublications.com>

**Additional services and information for *Educational Researcher* can be found at:**

**Email Alerts:** <http://er.aera.net/alerts>

**Subscriptions:** <http://er.aera.net/subscriptions>

**Reprints:** <http://www.aera.net/reprints>

**Permissions:** <http://www.aera.net/permissions>

>> [Version of Record](#) - May 3, 2012

[What is This?](#)

# Eighth Annual Brown Lecture in Education Research

## Through a Glass Darkly: The Persistence of Race in Education Research & Scholarship

Gloria Ladson-Billings<sup>1</sup>

Although education researchers understand that race is a problematic concept of spurious value, the concept persists in our research and scholarship. Each of the social sciences that contribute to the field of education has a history of racialized understandings that make their way to both our research and practice. Until we begin to carefully examine the way race and racialized thinking influence our work, we will continue to perpetuate destructive thinking about the capabilities of learners based on race.

**Keywords:** ethnicity; multicultural education; race; research methodology

For now we see through a glass darkly. . .

I Corinthians 13:12

Then she began to look about and noticed that what could be seen from the old room was quite common and uninteresting, but that all the rest was as different as possible. . . .

*Through the Looking Glass (And What Alice Found There)*

Lewis Carroll

This lecture begins with a woman. Her name is Cora Lyles Woodward. She was born in 1896 in a Fairfield County, South Carolina, town called Blair. Cora is at the center of this discussion because of the way race delimited her world and her possibilities and how her racial identification underscores the way “research” functions to serve ongoing narratives of superiority/inferiority, citizen/alien, intelligent/unintelligent, and human/inhuman for example. Much of our understanding of complex societies comes from an absolute reliance on the way the empirical accurately reflects reality. In Cora’s case, the 1920s census tells us that she was a housewife married to Robert P. Woodward, mother of three, and designated by the census enumerator as a “mulatto”—child of mixed race (Black/White) parents. Ten years later, Cora shows up on the 1930s census again as a “housewife” and now mother of seven children. This time, the enumerator lists her as a “Negro.” How did Cora’s racial identity

shift in 10 years? The simple answers that demographers provide is that the racial categories have changed. Ever since the United States Census Bureau began asking the question, “What is your race?” the available categories have been shifting and changing with White and Black as constant yet polar opposites. In between, there were categories like “Mongoloid,” “Indian,” “Mulatto,” “Quadroon,” and “Octoroon” (Lee, 1993). These last three categories are reminiscent of the Napoleonic categorizations that emerged out of Louisiana where, like blood quantum theories regarding “Indian-ness,” blackness is being determined according to the perceived amount of “black blood” one has. Thus, a mulatto is the product of one White parent and one Black parent (e.g., President Obama, Halle Berry, Lenny Kravitz, Mariah Carey). A quadroon has one Black grandparent and an octoroon has one Black great grandparent. The point of these classifications was to codify issues of inheritance and social status along with maintaining the myth of White supremacy. It is interesting to note that citizens of Mexican descent were considered White and the basis for the famous Lemon Grove School District decision rested on the notion that Mexican Americans were White, not Black or American Indian (Ferg-Cadima, 2004).

But, Cora Lyles Woodward’s racial identification change is not merely about the shift in federal racial classifications for it is important to recognize that Cora never fit the category of “mulatto.” She was not the product of a White and Black union. Her mother was Black and her father reputedly Black and American Indian. However, visually she appeared to be solely African American. Why then, does the enumerator give her a more “privileged” identity than her husband Robert Preston Woodward who is identified throughout the census as “Negro?” My interest in the Woodwards is not merely academic. Robert and Cora Woodward were my grandparents but the puzzle of Cora’s shifting racial identity also intrigues me as a scholar. My thesis for the purpose of this lecture is that Cora Woodward is granted an almost honorary whiteness because of the response to the U.S. Census form question no. 4 that asks about a person’s literacy. While the form indicates that Robert is illiterate (I can attest that he was not), Cora’s designation is literate. I want to

<sup>1</sup>University of Wisconsin-Madison, Madison, WI

argue that education and race—in this case, literacy and race—have been intricately linked for centuries and until we begin to unpack those linkages we will continue to struggle to make sense of how race operates in our research and scholarship.

## Race and Social Science Research

One early clue to the link between race and education comes when as Anderson (1988) states, “between 1800 and 1835, most of the southern states enacted legislation making it a crime to teach enslaved children to read or write” (p. 2). This specific policy decision places a line between literacy and freedom, education and humanity. This is significant because as the 19th century was coming to an end, the English mathematician Sir Francis Galton first coined the term *eugenics*. He wrote, “Eugenics is the study of the agencies under social control that seek to improve or impair the racial qualities of future generations either physically or mentally” (Galton, 1883, frontispiece). Galton’s ideas were well received in the United States and became foundational to the fledgling social sciences. In a 1921 *Good Housekeeping* magazine essay, then–vice president Calvin Coolidge wrote:

There are racial considerations too grave to be brushed aside for any sentimental reasons. Biological laws tell us that certain divergent people will not mix or blend. The Nordics propagate themselves successfully. With other races, the outcome shows deterioration on both sides. Quality of mind and body suggests that observance of ethnic law is as great a necessity to a nation as immigration law. (p. 14)

Some might argue that sentiments like those expressed by Coolidge may have been common during the 1920s but that there must have been a firewall that existed between the nativism and racism of the culture and the science that the academy produced. Sadly, education and the social sciences did not rise above the popular beliefs regarding genetic inferiority attached to race and ethnicity. According to Selden (1999), colleges and universities “offering courses in eugenics increased from 44 in 1914 to 376 in 1928” (p. 14).

One of education research’s major figures, Lewis Terman, Professor of Education at Stanford University and inventor of the Stanford-Binet Intelligence test, was a noted eugenicist. After serving the U.S. as a psychologist and intelligence test administrator during World War I, Terman advocated for the use of intelligence tests in schools. After administering his tests to Spanish-speakers and African Americans, Terman (1916) concluded:

High-grade or border-line deficiency . . . is very, very common among Spanish-Indian and Mexican families of the Southwest and also among negroes. Their dullness seems to be racial, or at least inherent in the family stocks from which they come. . . . Children of this group should be segregated into separate classes. . . . They cannot master abstractions but they can often be made into efficient workers . . . from a eugenic point of view they constitute a grave problem because of their unusually prolific breeding.” (pp. 91–92)

I highlight Terman here for a couple of reasons—first because he is such a fixture in the education research canon and second because as a Stanford School of Education alumna I know how much cognitive dissonance my very existence would present for

him. We laud Terman for his longitudinal studies of giftedness that appears in the five-volume *Genetic Studies of Genius* (1925–1959) and I have known colleagues across the academy who identify proudly as “Termites.” But rarely do we challenge the basis on which this work rests. Clearly no African American or Latino children were thought worthy for Terman’s work. We do not discredit his sampling techniques despite his exclusion of entire groups of eligible subjects. Instead, we have used Terman’s work as the basis for “gifted and talented” programs throughout the nation.

Our colleagues in sociology have openly declared that the ability to collect data and do scientific research on race is vital to their enterprise (American Sociological Association 2003). They issued their 2003 statement (which our own Executive Director, Dr. Felice Levine helped to draft) in response to a politically conservative movement to eliminate racial classification in state agencies such as schools, health institutions, prisons, etc. They assert, “When a concept is central to societal organization, examining how, when, and why people in that society use the concept is vital to understanding the organization and consequences of social relationships.” Their statement argues that there are four primary areas of inquiry that interest sociologists regarding racial classification:

- A sorting mechanism for mating, marriage, and adoption.
- A stratifying practice for providing or denying access to resources.
- An organizational device for mobilization to maintain or challenge systems or racial stratification.
- A basis for scientifically investigating proximate cases.

But it is not merely the professional association statement of sociology that helps us understand the field’s link to race as a central concept. Howard Winant (2000) argues, “race has always been a significant sociological theme, from the founding of the field and the formulation of the ‘classical’ theoretical statements to the present.” The seminal work in 20th-century racial theorizing comes from pioneering work by W. E. B. DuBois in his study of Black life in Philadelphia (1998 [1899]). His conceptualization of “the veil” and his understanding of racial dualism or “double consciousness” provide both theoretical sophistication and empirical rigor to the study of race in sociology. Additionally, sociologists at the Chicago School produced a large body of work on race that demonstrates a melding of pragmatism and progressivism. The Chicago School scholars receive credit for breaking from the notion of racial biologism to assert strongly that race was socially constructed. Indeed, it was the research of a sociologist, Kenneth Clark, and his wife Mamie that brought about the civil rights victory known as *Brown* as he testified about the social psychological harm of segregation on behalf of the plaintiff.

In “The Dark Side of the Force: One Hundred Years of the Sociology of Race,” Winant (2007) details the genealogy of race in sociology over the last 100 years and points out the field’s linkage to the broader sociopolitical trends. He argues “politically the field can be divided . . . in three parts: mainstream, insurgent, and reactionary.” While these explanations are too complex for the space allotted to this lecture, I do want to underscore Winant’s assertion, “the field of sociology is necessarily part of the problem it is trying to explain” (p. 537).

I take Winant's assertion as a relevant segue to another social science that informs education—anthropology. As someone who was trained in anthropology and a member of the American Anthropological Association (AAA), I have watched carefully the ways that race was taken up in the field. For more than 3 years, AAA has conducted a public education project titled, "Race: Are We So Different?" This project garnered more than 4 million dollars in grant support. More than 1.5 million people have walked through the 5,000-square-foot exhibit that explores the science, history, and lived experiences of race and racism in our nation and has traveled to 14 museums across the U.S. For those who know the field of anthropology, this heavy investment in debunking prevailing thinking about race is justified since anthropology is so heavily implicated in forming our ideas and thinking about race.

Anthropology emerged after the age of Western European exploration as "the study of humans" and that study was almost always focused on the people in European colonies. Thus, anthropology was conceived as a study of "the other." Anthropologist Audrey Smedley (1993) points out that race began as a folk classification—"ideologies, distinctions, and selective perceptions that constitute a society's popular imagery and interpretations of the world" (p. 25). But, by the mid- to late 18th century naturalists and other learned men "gave credence and legitimacy [to race] as a supposed product of scientific investigations" (p. 26). Race was regularly on display in World's Fairs and Exhibitions with the classification and ranking of various ethnic and cultural groups. In the past, anthropologists regularly provided the so-called science for these classifications and rankings. The major influence of anthropology on our thinking about race was in the formation of race as a worldview.

Race as a worldview conceives of human populations as inherently unequal and according to Smedley (1993) in the early decades of the 19th century, race in North America contained five ideological components that form a structure of hierarchy and inequality. These elements are:

- Universal classification of human groups as exclusive and discrete biotic entities;
- Imposition of a non-egalitarian ethos that requires the ranking of these groups in relation to each other;
- A belief that the outer physical characteristics of human populations were surface manifestations of inner qualities such as intellect, morality, and temperament;
- A belief that all these characteristics, both outer and inner, were heritable;
- Each exclusive group (or race) was created unique and distinct by nature or by God, so that the imputed differences, believed fixed and unalterable, could never be bridged or transcended (p. 27).

## Race and Education Research

Finally, we arrive at the point to connect race with education research. Because education is a field heavily dependent on the social science disciplines it is logical to assume that it contains some of the shortcomings of those disciplines regarding a concept like race. Education research borrows psychology's notions of normal and exceptional individuals, sociology's notions of

normal and exceptional groups such as families and communities, as well as institutions and anthropology's notions of normal and exceptional cultures with implicit beliefs about the classification and ranking of cultural groups.

As a young scholar, I was deeply disturbed by the way race was dealt with in my graduate studies. The research was quick to establish categories like race, class, and gender as logical ways to consider human variation and to promote notions of superiority and inferiority within those categorical boundaries. I also found it puzzling that so many education research findings and innovations were linked to race without clear attribution of how race helped move and develop the field. For example, Elizabeth Cohen's (1994) path-breaking work on status equalization led to almost everything we know about cooperative grouping in instruction. Cohen was clear that her work was important for helping the desegregation efforts. Subsequent scholars seem to dismiss or ignore the role race played in helping us understand classroom dynamics and cooperative grouping.

Large portions of the research done on Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 rely on schooling experiences of racialized groups in Head Start, Follow Through, and other compensatory programming. Even the beloved "Sesame Street" children's television program has relied heavily on the lives and day-to-day experiences of children of color. A page on a Georgetown University early childhood website describing the show states, "devised in 1968 as a program designed to enhance school readiness in low-income and minority children, Sesame Street was the first television series to attempt to teach an educational curriculum to its viewers" (retrieved electronically on September 22, 2011, from <http://elp.georgetown.edu/linktext.cfm?lid=8>). A similar model was used for older elementary-age children in "The Electric Company," a Children's Television Workshop program that ran for six seasons.

In my dissertation (Ladson, 1983), I focused on Black students' conceptualizations of themselves as citizens because an article on the National Assessment of Educational Progress citizenship objectives test declared that they were poorer citizens than their White counterparts. I found this characterization hyperbolic given the long history of African Americans' dedication to the nation from fighting in every war since the American Revolution to literally dying for the franchise. This research was the beginning of my understanding of the paradigmatic and epistemologic challenges research aimed at unpacking race must confront.

Years later as a part of my Spencer postdoctoral fellowship, I was still plagued with the paradigmatic issue. Since much of the literature is fixated on failure and what is wrong with African American and other students of color, I had the temerity and unmitigated gall to ask, "What is right with African American students and what happens in those classrooms where teachers are successful with them?" The first roadblock I encountered was that almost all of the education research literature on African American students was organized around failure. I sat before a computer terminal and entered the search terms, "Black education" and African American education. Within two clicks of the computer I saw the cross references, "see culturally deprived; see culturally deficient." Our entire field was resting on a deficit paradigm that makes it difficult to uncouple the work we want to



do from the centuries of work handed down from ideological positions that emerged from constitutive disciplines that insist on the inferiority of entire groups of people. So I had to begin without the help of conventional education research literature and reach for existence proofs as the evidentiary basis on which to make claims of African American excellence and success. That is not a particularly hard case to make. If W. E. B. DuBois could earn a Ph.D. in history from Harvard in 1895 (the first African American to do so), if Carter G. Woodson could earn a Ph.D. in history from Harvard in 1912 (the second African American to do so), if Anna Julia Cooper could come out of slavery and become teacher and school principal, and if George Washington Carver could come out of slavery and complete a master's degree in botany from Iowa State and go on to be one of the nation's most prolific scientists then we know that discourses about African American intellectual inferiority cannot stand in the face of these amazing biographies.

However, I know that certain analyses suggest that people like those previously mentioned reflect what we in research call "outliers." They become the exceptions that prove the rule. So, we need a greater sample for empirical and statistical power. For this, I point to the 105 Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) in this country. All but 6 of these institutions were founded in former slave states. Most were established at the end of the Civil War, with the exception of Cheyney University of Pennsylvania, established in 1837, Lincoln University in Pennsylvania, established in 1854, and Wilberforce University in Ohio, established in 1856.

So desperate for education were the newly emancipated African Americans that they started these schools in boxcars (Atlanta University), church basements (Spelman College), and on garbage dumps (Bethune-Cookman). These institutions started in meager circumstances with limited resources produced some of the nation's best minds—W. E. B. DuBois, Thurgood Marshall, Martin Luther King Jr., and Toni Morrison. Even today, HBCUs produce 50% of the Black teachers and 70% of Black dentists. I knew that African American success and excellence was both possible and a reality.

My research on successful teachers of African American students allowed me to build the theory of culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1995) where we could see that success in a classroom of African American students rests on three propositions: focus on student learning, development of cultural competence, and promotion of sociopolitical consciousness. It did not rest on tinkering with the curriculum or demanding absolute quiet or having everyone wear a uniform. It rests on a teacher who believes deeply in the intellectual capability of the student and his or her own efficacious abilities. When I was first asked "why African American students and success" I immediately responded, "Why not?" If we can improve the system for what the Bible calls "the least of these," it seems reasonable that it will provide a way to improve it for all others. Interesting, the question of "why African Americans" has never come up among my colleagues in Sweden, Japan, the UK, or Brazil. They are only interested in the portability of the theory for struggling students in their countries.

As my work on culturally relevant pedagogy was starting to get some recognition, I found myself grappling with a new

theoretical issue that was more likely to bring less sanguine responses—critical race theory. The title of this lecture is "Through a Glass Darkly: The Persistence of Race in Education Research." I chose the title because I believe much of what we do in education research regarding race is cloudy and imprecise. We are using crude measures to sort and slot people into categories—Black, White, Latino, immigrant, English-speaking, low-income, disabled, first-generation, etc.—as if we don't live our lives across multiple categories of being or as if some of the categories that are most salient in our lives aren't invisible. We know little about things like the faith commitments of students. We know little about the way family structure and relations affect students—here I am not merely talking about things like one- versus two-parent households or number of siblings. Rather, I am talking about things like family cohesion and fictive and actual kin networks. For example, I was in a household with only one sibling, my brother, but I attended high school with 11 first cousins. Those many kin relations made me wary of misbehaving—there were far too many witnesses. We know little about the role of sponsorship in student success. In her outstanding work on literacy, Brandt (1998) argues for a concept of "sponsors of literacy" in which "sponsors . . . are any agents, local or distant, concrete or abstract, who enable, support, teach, model, as well as recruit, regulate, suppress, or withhold literacy—and gain advantage by it in some way" (p. 166).

Extremely important to me as a researcher is the impact of race—explicitly and implicitly manifested—on learning. Does the race of the teacher and other classmates matter for learners? Does the race of the students, their parents, and administrator matter to teachers? And if so, HOW does it matter? Does it matter in ways that enhance or thwart student learning and academic achievement? While culturally relevant pedagogy has been the site of most of my empirical work, it is my theoretical foray into critical race theory that has drawn the most skepticism and ire from colleagues and others.

Critical race theory (CRT) comes from legal scholarship that argues that racism is normal, not aberrant, in U.S. society (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). CRT uses storytelling or more accurately counternarratives to weave legal truths in fanciful and oppositional ways. It also uses critical social science and scholarship from Black studies, Latino studies, Asian American studies, and feminist studies to explore the ways race continues to have power and predictive value. One of the hallmarks of critical race theory work is the chronicle. Here, the scholar tells a tale—a moral story or parable—to illustrate a deeper truth. All CRT chronicles are based on actual events or legal cases. The one I have constructed follows that pattern. So, as I close I leave you with "The Chronicle of the Best Black Students":

*Barry and Bonnie Black were an African American couple who had dreams and aspirations. They were going somewhere. During the first years of their marriage they scrimped and saved so they could buy a lovely old home in the city's historic district. On the day they moved in, they had to pinch themselves as they walked through the home filled with original fireplaces and stately hardwoods. As they made it to the third floor attic area, they discovered that the previous owners had left behind some possessions. One that caught Bonnie's eye appeared to be an ancient lamp—the kind you saw in movies from somewhere in Turkey or Pakistan. When Barry noticed the lamp, he*

smiled at Bonnie and asked, "You don't suppose if we rub it we'll produce a genie do you?" Bonnie giggled and said, "It couldn't hurt!" Barry picked up the lamp and began to rub, "Let's see, I think I'll ask to get this big mortgage paid off," he quipped. No sooner than the words left his mouth a cloud of smoke and indeed a genie appeared. "Your wish is my command," bellowed the genie. Barry and Bonnie grabbed each other and stood with their mouths agape. "What in the world?" started Bonnie. "C'mon, c'mon I don't have all day," replied the genie. "Let's hear your wish." Barry seemed to compose himself and said, "Wish . . . I thought we're supposed to get three wishes." "You people watch too many movies. We're in the middle of a recession. You get ONE wish," replied their ephemeral guest. Barry and Bonnie looked at each other for what seemed an eternity and then in unison they said, "We'd like to have the 'best Black children!'"

Sure enough when the couples' first baby, Bonita was born, she looked like the best Black child. She was beautiful, alert, and in perfect health. As the years progressed, the couple had two additional children, and while they did not get three wishes it appeared that they got the three best Black children ever. Barry and Bonnie delighted in raising Bonita, Barak, and Belinda . . . their best Black children.

By the time Bonita arrived at George Washington Community High School, she had proven herself to be a model student. She excelled in the classroom and in the arts. Although she was the only African American in the school she was well liked and a stellar student. In her senior year, Bonita was taking all Advanced Placement courses and was first violinist in the school's symphony orchestra. When the grade chairman calculated the grades, it was apparent that Bonita was the class valedictorian. Barry and Bonnie gushed with pride and said to each other, "We do have the best Black children." A few days before graduation the principal summoned Bonita to the office. She felt certain he wanted to give her some special congratulatory words. However, once in the office the principal informed Bonita that the school was going to "go in a different direction" this year and have "co-valedictorians." "I don't understand," Bonita remarked. "I was clearly the best student in the graduating class." "I know," smiled the principal. "We just thought it would be fair to be a bit more inclusive!"

Although puzzled about what happened with Bonita and the valedictory address, the Blacks knew that son Barak would have an amazing high school career. The moment Barak set foot in Washington High, he was a star. He was a brilliant student with drop-dead good looks and amazing athletic ability. Barak was captain of both the debate team and the football team. In his senior year, he ran for Homecoming King and to no one's surprise he won handily. Barak was elated about this honor. He would lead the homecoming parade by riding in a sleek convertible seated beside a beautiful Homecoming Queen. Would it be Stacey, the cheerleader, or Lizzie, the beautiful brainiac in his physics class? Either way, he'd be looking good as he led the parade, led his team to a victory, and received the accolades of his classmates at the big homecoming dance. The only thing better than this would be getting into Stanford, where he could excel in engineering and on the football field.

Two days before the big homecoming festivities, Barak received a summons to the principal's office. Like his sister before him, Barak assumed the call was to commend him for his excellence. However, once again one of the best Black children would hear disappointing news. "Congratulations, son," the principal began. "I am sure your parents are quite proud of you. "Yes, sir, they

are," responded Barak. "Well, we here at Washington High are also proud. However, we're going to make a little change in the homecoming parade and dance this year. You will be our king, but there won't be a homecoming queen." "Why not?" exclaimed Barak. "Did the homecoming queen get ill? Can't the first runner-up take her place?" "Errr, no, I don't think that's going to happen, son," the principal replied. "You're a big handsome guy and you're going to look great sitting in that car. In fact, you get to choose what you want to wear, instead of having to coordinate with some girl. You can wear a tuxedo, or go casual, or hey . . . you could wear your football jersey since you'll be starring in the game after the parade. That's gonna be something special."

When Barak told his parents what happened, they looked at each other knowingly and sighed a huge sigh. "Here we go again," Barry remarked.

When time came for Barry and Bonnie to send their third best Black child, Belinda to George Washington Community High School, Bonnie told Barry she had another idea in mind. "I was thinking, dear," she began, "what if we sent Belinda to Carver High School where we attended?" "George Washington Carver High?" Barry questioned. "Yes . . . we know Belinda is exceptionally smart like our other two children, artistically gifted like Bonita AND athletically exceptional like Barak. Belinda will excel no matter where she goes and we can ensure that she has enough enrichment opportunities to make up for possible shortcomings at the school. At least we will not have to see another disappointed kid when her excellence rises above the others." "You may have a point," Barry replied. "We could give it a try and if things don't seem to be working she can always transfer back here to George Washington Community High School."

Belinda was surprised her parents enrolled her in Carver High but within a few weeks she was among the most popular kids at the school. Her phone was constantly ringing and she had more dates than she could keep up with. She was captain of the debate team, head cheerleader during football season, starting point guard on the girls' basketball team, and class president. By the time she had completed four years at Carver, Belinda had held every major office in the student government. She had scores of friends and was much loved by the teachers and administrators. She loved going to school and her 4.0 grade point average made her a shoe in for valedictorian and the university of her choice.

In Spring when colleges and universities began sending out their admissions decisions, the Black family's mailbox was inundated with acceptances. However, Belinda's first choice, the state's elite public university sent a very thin envelope with a letter that began ". . . we regret to inform you . . ." Barry and Bonnie could not believe it. Why on earth would the state university reject her? Her profile was stellar. What could have happened? Determined not to have another disappointed best Black child, Barry and Bonnie contacted elite state university to see if there was some mistake. They learned that although Belinda had a fantastic profile, her 4.0 grade point average was eclipsed by the better than 4.0 averages of her White counterparts. George Washington Carver High School did not offer any advanced placement courses to allow Belinda to build a GPA that was greater than 4.0.

So, despite raising three of the best Black children, Barry and Bonnie could not shield their children from the endemic racism that was a part of the society. They tried playing by the rules and that did not work. They tried an alternative strategy and that did not work.

*Their children like millions of Black and Brown children had to learn the gritty reality—despite how hard we try, race still matters.*

However, in addition to the salience of race I want to underscore the reality that all parents send their best children to school . . . regardless of their race, ethnicity, gender, language, immigrant status, or ability. They don't have a set of spare, better children tucked away in a china cabinet. The children who walk through the doors of the nation's schools are the best Black, Brown, Yellow, Red, and White children we have and until we truly recognize and embrace that reality we will continue to look through a glass darkly.

## REFERENCES

- American Sociological Association. (2003). *The importance of collecting data and doing social scientific research on race*. Washington, DC: Author.
- Anderson, J. D. (1988). *The education of Blacks in the south, 1860-1935*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.
- Brandt, D. (1998). The sponsors of literacy. *College Composition and Communication*, 49, 165–185.
- Cohen, E. (1994). *Designing groupwork: Strategies for heterogeneous classrooms*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- Delgado, R., & Stefancic, J. (2001). *Critical race theory: An introduction*. New York: New York University Press.
- DuBois, W. E. B. (1998). *The Philadelphia Negro: A social study*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press. (Original work published 1899)
- Ferg-Cadima, J. A. (2004). Black, white and brown: Latino school desegregation efforts in the pre- and post-*Brown vs. Board of Education* era. Washington, DC: MALDEF.
- Galton, F. (1883). *Inquiries into human faculty and its development*. London: Macmillan.
- Ladson, G. (1983). *Citizenship and values: An ethnographic study of citizenship and values in a predominately Black school setting* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). Stanford University, Stanford, CA.
- Ladson-Billings, G. (1995). Toward a theory of culturally relevant pedagogy. *American Educational Research Journal*, 32, 465–491.
- Lee, S. M. (1993). Racial classifications in the U.S. census: 1890–1990. *Ethnic and Race Studies*, 16, 75–94.
- Selden, S. (1999). *Inheriting shame: The story of eugenics in America*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- Smedley, A. (1993). *Race in North America: Origins and evolution of a worldview*. Boulder, CO: Westview.
- Terman, L. M. (1916). *The measurement of intelligence*. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin.
- Terman, L. M. (1925–1959). *Genetic studies of genius* (Vols. I–V). Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Winant, H. (2000). Race and race theory. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 26, 169–185.
- Winant, H. (2007). The dark side of the force: One hundred years of the sociology of race. In C. Calhoun (Ed.), *Sociology in American: A history* (pp. 535–571). Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

## AUTHOR

GLORIA LADSON-BILLINGS is the Kellner Family Chair in Urban Education and Professor of Curriculum and Instruction and Educational Policy Studies at University of Wisconsin-Madison, 225 N. Mills Street, Madison, WI 53719; [gildadson@wisc.edu](mailto:gildadson@wisc.edu). Her research focuses on culturally relevant pedagogical practices and critical race applications to education.

Manuscript received January 19, 2012

Accepted February 5, 2012